Please join the Science, Religion, and Lunch Seminars (SRLS) hosted by the Northern Plains Ethics Institute for:

Lana Rakow, Ph.D.
Professor Emerita, University of North Dakota

Science, Religion, and Democracy: John Dewey and a Common Faith

12-1 pm, April 7, 2020
Room of Nations, Memorial Union

Abstract: Is democracy possible? Is it even desirable? In this so-called post-truth era, the public seems unable or unwilling to discern the truth in the face of often conflicting scientific and religious claims. How can a democracy function when there is no agreement on the truth? For guidance we can look to one of the most well-known defenders of democracy in the first half of the 20th century, American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952). Dewey argued that democracy as a form of government is a natural outgrowth of local associated life. For democracy to function well, the conditions for what he called intelligent opinion are needed, conditions that include the means for creating shared meaning locally and for engaging as a broader national public that attends to consequences. Consequences are the measure of what we call truth, according to Dewey. In order to have the best consequences and to adjust them as needed, democracy thus requires the broad participation of all in contributing to knowledge, aided by science. Religion, on the other hand, is based on a belief in the supernatural that provides no methods for such environmental adaptation. We do not have to give up faith or being religious if we set aside the supernatural, Dewey argued. Religious experiences emanate from the capacity of our imagination: we can share a common faith in a desired future, now unseen.

Bio: Lana Rakow is the author of the 2019 book John Dewey: A Critical Introduction to Media and Communication Theory (Peter Lang) and the author or editor of four other books on feminist theory, media, and technology. Dr. Rakow has a B.A. degree in journalism and humanities and an M.A. degree in American literature and the English language, both from the University of North Dakota, and a Ph.D. in communication and cultural studies from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. She taught and served in administration at Franklin College in Indiana and the University of Wisconsin-Parkside before returning to UND as a professor of communication and an administrator. She founded the UND Center for Community Engagement in 2004 and retired from UND in 2016 to work full time on her book on John Dewey. She now lives in West Fargo and continues academic pursuits as an author and an associate editor of Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly.

If you are interested in giving a seminar, then please contact Syed Ahmed at syed.ahmed@ndsu.edu or Dennis Cooley at dennis.cooley@ndsu.edu.